

Knowing God, Knowing Self

Knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are closely tied together. These are interdependent truths. We cannot know God accurately without crucial self-understanding, yet we cannot understand ourselves accurately without seeing ourselves in relation to God. As John Calvin wrote, “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” A proper view of God and a proper view of man are critical to our own personal growth as well as in explaining our belief to others. This workshop will develop the link between knowing God and knowing one’s self, and how the two are inseparable.

Judy Streeter and her husband Tom have worked to develop churches that emphasise worship, community, small groups, sound teaching, discipleship, and meaningful engagement with culture. Believing that evangelism and the strength of the church are only as effective as the disciple-making process, she has developed materials to facilitate women in properly nurturing growth in others. Her book, *Disciplemaking: Doing What Christ Commanded*, summarises her understanding and passion in this area. Music occupies a high place in Judy’s life in the church and as a teacher and performer. Always ready to travel, she and Tom have led Reformation tours in Europe. A church musician since childhood, Judy studied piano and organ and is a performer as well as a piano teacher. One of her passions is the rich heritage of music the church has enjoyed throughout the centuries.

INTRODUCTION

John Calvin (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* p. 37-38):

“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other....indeed, we cannot aspire to Him in earnest until we have begun to be displeased with ourselves.

On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”

Charles Spurgeon (Sermon on *The Immutability of God*, 1855):

“It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of man is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of God. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. No subject of contemplation will end more to humble the mind than thoughts of God.

But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. I know of nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of God.”

R.C. Sproul (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* p. 127):

“Ultimately, anthropology, the study of mankind, is a subdivision of theology, the study of God. The crisis of modern humanity is found in the rupture between anthropology and theology, between the study of human beings and the study of God.” Later, he says, “To be *created by* God is to be *related to* God.”

I. KNOWING GOD

Because God is a communicative God, He has gone to great lengths to make Himself known. He has not revealed everything about Himself, but He has chosen to reveal everything we need to know about Him.

A. The Nature and Characteristics of God

- Isaiah 40-66 --- Good exercise: write down everything you read about the nature and character of God.

B. The Attributes of God

- Incommunicable attributes
- Communicable attributes

C. The Triune God

A great hallmark of Christianity is our belief in a triune God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This belief makes Christianity unique among the world religions. We believe in one God who is three distinct Persons, all equal in essence because they share the same divine nature. All fully God. No greater, no lesser.

- Love and community
- Unity and diversity
- Form and function
- Harmony and variety
- Ideal of subordination
- Genesis 1:26 --- first mention of the Trinity --- “Let *us* make man in our image.”

II. Knowing Man

A. Made in the Likeness of God

- Evidence of being image-bearers
- Derived identity
- Implications of this doctrine
- Psalm 8:4-6

The value of any human being does not come from his performance, goodness or contribution to mankind. His value is that he carries in his whole being the image of God. This is the bottom line for dignity, value, worth and purpose.

B. Creation Mandates

In her book, *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey says: “The Christian message does not begin with ‘accept Christ as your Savior’; it begins with ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ The Bible teaches that God is the sole source of the entire created order. His creation ordinances give the world its order and structure.”

Because “Genesis” means “*origins*,” it contains the basic ingredients of civilization that God had in mind when creating the world and its creatures. His creation ordinances not only help define the world He made, but who we are and how we should live in this world.

1. Humanity

- Material beings made of the earth’s substance
- Spiritual beings, given immaterial life from the breath of God
- Limited beings needing something outside ourselves to complete us
- Embodied human beings made that way for time and eternity

True spirituality involves embracing our humanness and living within what that means.

2. Sexuality

- Gen. 1:26, 27: “*male and female He created them.*”
Anatomically descriptive words in Hebrew
- Our distinctions as male and female are to be celebrated, embraced, protected, and controlled.

3. Culture

- Gen. 1:28: “*...be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion...*”
- Marriage, families, communities, cities, nations, work, education, laws, schools, government, churches, commerce, etc.
- The development of the created earth will be societal and cultural in form.
- Created humans are the instruments to reign over the earth physically, socially and culturally, making it productive and beautiful.

The entrance of sin did not abolish the cultural mandate. God loves His created world, and we continue to operate under this creational ordinance.

4. Marriage

- Gen. 2:21-25: the first marriage between a man and woman is described
- Instituted to achieve the highest form of intimacy between humans
- Instituted for societal order and strength

Whether or not we are ever married, we affirm and protect this creational mandate.

5. Family

- Gen. 2:24, 4:1-2: a description of the first nuclear family
- Goodness and safety of the original design
- Holding to the ideal even in a broken and fallen world

The family is not only for the benefit of the father, mother and children, but for the society at large. It provides a foundation upon which other institutions and government are built.

6. Work

- Gen. 2:2, 3; Ps. 8:3; Ps. 92:4; 104:31; Eccl. 7:13
God receives pleasure from His work
- Gen. 2:15: work before the Fall, not a result of it. Adam was given a vocation that occupied him day to day.

It stands to reason that if God enjoyed working, that man would also derive pleasure from the work of his hands. Work is dignified by God because He did it Himself and ordained it for mankind.

7. Rest

- Gen. 2:2, 3: God chose to rest from His work
- Ex. 31:15; Ex. 33:14; Ex. 35:2; Heb. 4:4, 5

God enjoyed what He did at creation and pronounced it as “good” and “very good.” But that did not mean He continued doing it endlessly. He was not tired. He did not run out of creative ideas. He chose to rest and thus built that into His creatures as well as the creation.